



Future tense

RELAX: DAVID LOADER IS GOING TO EXPLAIN THAT WE SHOULD BE MINDFUL OF THE FUTURE THAT IMPINGES ON OUR PRESENT, BECAUSE THE SEEDS OF OUR FUTURE ARE IN THE HERE AND NOW.

We all live in the here and now, but in our personal and professional lives as school leaders the future impinges on us. Brent Davies coined the phrase parallel leadership to describe this aspect of what leaders do, living and working in two domains, the present and the future.

It's impossible to ignore the pressing needs of the present – the parent who must see you today, the postponed budget meeting from last week, the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy tests – but if we focus only on the present and ignore the future we do so at our peril, as the seeds of our future are with us now.

Some would have us believe that technology is one of those future things we have to look at 'sometime soon.' Perhaps we can afford to ignore some recent innovations such as augmented reality, where an environment is amplified by computer-generated sensory input with sound and graphics, although augmented reality is closer now with 3D television in an increasing number of homes. Perhaps we can close our minds to open content, accessing free content on the internet, as education is not yet a culture that rewards sharing. And as for gesture-based computing, we can leave that to the games people at present – but keep in mind that it's currently the focus of a lot of well-funded research.

The truth, though, is that the future is definitely now for some technologies. Consider electronic books which offer new opportunities for reading, storing and transforming data. E-books aren't just digital text; they're multimedia and multifunctional. Pick one up and you won't want to put it down. They facilitate active student involvement by allowing annotation and augmentation of text and pictures, they enable immersive

experiences – visiting places and experiencing life in other settings – and they support social interaction. What's more, the user is free to select only what they need to keep current, just as is happening with music downloads. E-books support and encourage active learning in a digital world well known to our young people.

Similarly the ubiquitous mobile – what we used to call a phone – is no longer simply a communication device. The mobile helps us to navigate, and keeps us in contact with our friends and up to date with knowledge. This device is everywhere except schools. The major inhibitor to technology's adoption is neither the device nor the students, it's us, the teachers, who are failing to see the possible connection between these devices and what could happen in our classrooms.

I know I'm generalising here, and concede that some schools, if unfortunately too few, have outstanding programs using students' mobiles as learning tools.

It's generally accepted today that four walls can no longer contain schooling. Last month I wrote about a new model of multi-campus education between Hamilton and Alexandra College in Victoria and Gaoyou Middle School in the province of Jiangsu in China. The partnership is enabling students to live and learn about different cultures and languages through a multi-campus venture. It's possible to do similar things using technology such as social networking tools and personal mobile devices. Indeed, the parents of Hamilton and Alexandra College students have been following their children's activities in China through such media. But the take-up of social networking tools by schools is slow. The problem is not a lack of technology but more a lack of knowledge of how to use it. As the Commonwealth

government discovered in its handout of computers as part of the Digital Education Revolution, you need more than equipment to transform education, you need substantial professional staff development before that technology will be incorporated into the teaching and learning process.

Our exact future is unknowable, but we can make best guesses and prepare for alternative futures. Recently I found a useful resource for such future thinking – *The Horizon Report*, available free on the internet. Produced by the New Media Consortium's Horizon Project, it's a qualitative research project established in 2002 that identifies and describes emerging technologies likely to have a large impact on teaching, learning or creative inquiry, and it's well worth a look.

Of course, some of us are finding even the present difficult to manage, but that doesn't mean we can afford to ignore the future! **T**

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